

# ***Towards a Parenting Strategy: An All-island Symposium***

**Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013**

**Chartered Accountants House,  
47 – 49 Pearse Street, Dublin 2**

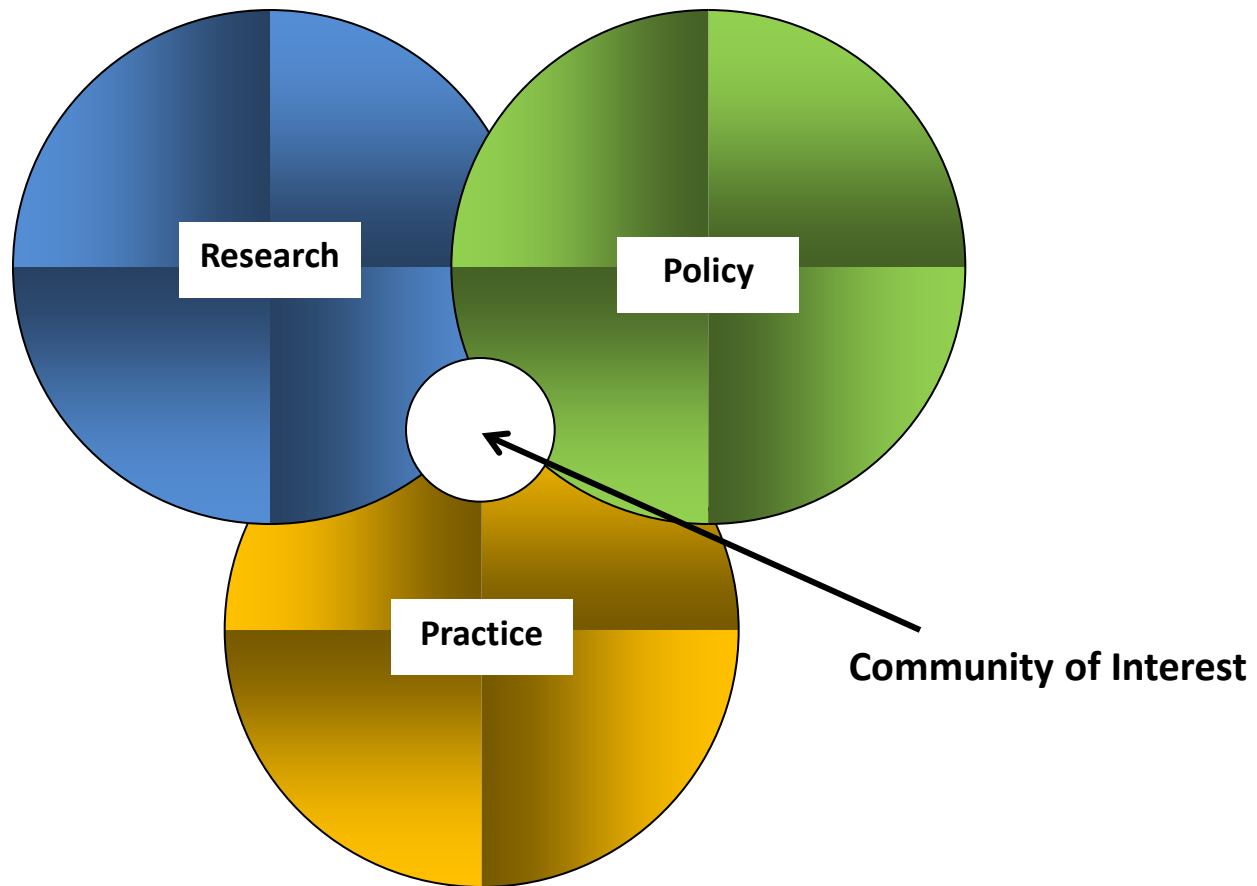
# Special Interest Group Position Paper

## Background

The Special Interest Group – Supporting parents *in their parenting role* was established in 2010 to:

- Create a unique space for developing thinking about issues relevant to parents in their parenting role and children and young people's wellbeing.
- Build bridges between people, groups and agencies, and add value to existing work and networks.

# Special Interest Group Position Paper



# Special Interest Group Position Paper

## Context

- Focus on children and/or family in policy and strategy documents.
- Approach to supporting parents based on intervening to remedy deficits rather than building on strengths.
- Absence of a parenting strategy in either jurisdiction.

# Special Interest Group Position Paper

## Context - Northern Ireland

- Strengthening of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership in Northern Ireland - to improve outcomes for children and young people through integrated planning and commissioning.
- Implement 'Our Children and Young People - Our Pledge'.
- The need to develop further and deliver on the 'Families Matter Strategy'.

# Special Interest Group Position Paper

## Context - Ireland

- Children's rights referendum and amendment to the Irish Constitution – perceived impact on parents particularly in disadvantaged communities.
- Development of the National Children and Young People's Policy Framework.
- Establishment of a new Child and Family Agency – National Service Delivery Framework.

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## Vision

*The island of Ireland will actively value and support parents in their parenting role to achieve better outcomes for children, parents and families*

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## Why parenting matters?

### Key messages from research:

The quality of parenting influences outcomes for children and young people and there is a need to plan services which will empower parents to maximise their parenting knowledge and skills

The quality of the parent-child relationship is associated with a number of outcomes including self-regulation and behaviour, engagement and participation, mental health, academic achievement and the ability to develop and sustain other relationships over a life time

A negative parenting style is strongly associated with aggressive behaviour, delinquency, depression, anxiety and high risk behaviours, for example smoking, drug/alcohol misuse



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A supportive home learning environment is positively associated with children's early achievements and well-being and influences social mobility

Warm, attentive, stimulating parenting is strongly associated with children's positive social, emotional, cognitive and physical development

Children who have benefited from good parenting have a greater chance of succeeding in school, of getting jobs and reducing the chance of criminal behaviour

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Parenting is an important mediator in redressing the effects of poverty and disadvantage

Parents are key mediators in developing and supporting desirable health related behaviours among children and addressing undesirable behaviours. With the worrying rise in childhood obesity across the island, there is a need to mobilise parents to address this problem now

Changes in the family only occur if we empower parents, and making decisions on their behalf will not have long term benefits. Parents need to be motivated and actively involved and therefore, parental support needs to embrace the principle that positive parenting must be mutually beneficial both to parents and to children

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## How parenting support is delivered is significant

Programmes need to be:

- underpinned by evidence
- implemented with rigour

These factors are as significant as the nature of parenting support.

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## **UNCRC articles relevant to parents**

UNCRC – Underpinning principle of Parenting Strategy.

Article 5 – “that governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to direct and guide their children so that as they grow they learn to use their rights properly.”

Article 9 – “to the rights of a child to stay in contact with their parent in the circumstances of being separated.”

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## What do we mean by parenting support?

*“Parenting support refers to a range of information, support, education, training and counselling and other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role.”*

*Prof Mary Daly, 2012*

### Practice Approaches, Services and Interventions that

- Empower parents by developing parenting confidence and competence.
- Enable parents to foster optimal child well-being and development outcomes.
- Increase enjoyment and satisfaction of parenting.

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## Benefits for parents

- Better family relationships
- Better mental and emotional health
- Better socio-economic prospects
- More active community participation
- More knowledgeable about their child's development
- Better home learning environment
- Increased understanding of the importance of play and interaction with their children

## Benefits for children

- Better child/parent bonding and attachment
- Better social, emotional and cognitive outcomes
- Better health outcomes i.e. reduction in childhood obesity
- Better self-identity and self-esteem
- Better resiliency and school readiness
- Better outcomes in later life across a range of psycho-social dimensions

## Benefits for society

- Reduced social costs
- Effective use of resources
- Productive, well educated workforce
- Reduction of inequalities
- Promoting Active Citizenship
- Developing Human and Social Capital
- Improved cross-departmental and cross-sectoral co-operation

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## **Policy commitment**

- A widespread recognition that parenting supports should be seen as normal.
- A higher value placed on parenting, with parenting a recognised issue on the National Policy agenda.
- A widespread recognition that the State has a role in supporting parenting.

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## Strategic approach

- A resourced national parenting policy framework/strategy, for example, Scotland.
- A co-ordinated approach to ensure that parenting support services are available to all families who want or need them, through a combination of universal and targeted supports.



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## Specific actions

- Focus on evidence to support effectiveness of programmes and practice and inform future service commissioning.
- Quality framework/standards for all practitioners and service providers delivering child, parenting and family services – children's workforce development.
- The need for cross-sectoral and cross departmental (Justice, Education, Health and Children) co-operation and collaboration between parenting programmes/supports and health services, early years, community development, youth services and family and educational supports.

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**Thank you**

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# PARENTING AND FAMILY POLICY – A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Professor Mary Daly

Department of Social Policy and Intervention

University of Oxford

# Parenting Support – What is it?

- Parenting support refers to a range of information, support, education, training, counselling and other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role
- Mainly takes the form of advice and information, one-to-one counselling and parenting programmes (such as Triple P, Incredible Years)
- Started to become popular in the 2000s especially

# Parenting Support as a Policy Field

- A range of measures involved.                      A continuum  
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- General support    Behavioural adaptation
- A series of variations and decisions involved
- What should be on offer?
- Is the focus on cure or prevention?
- Is the focus on those identified as in need or those who might more generally benefit?
- Should it be voluntary or compulsory?
- Should it be for mothers or fathers or both?
- For parents of children of which age?

# Where Did it Come From (1)?

- 1. Child-related Research and Policy Development
  - - health and welfare (child protection; child poverty)
  - - children's rights
  - - early child care and education (performance of children, social investment in children)
- 2. Family Functioning
  - - problem families
  - - societal order/social control
- 3. Parental Well-being/Parental Employment (both top-down and bottom-up)

# Where Did it Come From? (2)

- International Policy Actors
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Council of Europe also important and especially Recommendation (2006) 19 on positive parenting
- Some national governments also
- Why?
- Because in a complex and insecure world it appears to address a number of pressing issues



# England

- ▶ Has put in place the most elaborate architecture anywhere for parenting support:
- ▶ A national network of Children's Centres
- ▶ A national roll-out of education programmes for parents
- ▶ Evidence-based guidance on which programme to pick
- ▶ A national programme focusing on the education/support of young mothers
- ▶ Training programme for parenting workers
- ▶ A series of family intervention projects around parenting for 'troubled families'
- ▶ Summary: parenting measures very widespread, a mix of universal and targeted provision, institutionalised, generally top down

# France

- More bottom up, very local but also a national coordinating body
- Main form – REAAP (Parental Support and Guidance Networks) offering peer support and educational activities to parents on a universal basis
- More oriented to support than education or training
- Services focus on helping parents/children with schoolwork/attendance, family mediation, general parent/family information, drop in centres
- No parenting programmes
- Parental responsibility contracts

# Germany

- Germany has a range of services available for parents – these include information, various helplines and web services
- Closely linked with existing services - 1,000 open access information and counselling centres – free of charge and generally organised/offered by NGOs
- Family education/education for family life a strong orientation
- Also some parenting programmes but for parents of younger children and those experiencing difficulties
- Recently introduced Family Nurse service for ‘vulnerable’ young mothers

# Explanations for Cross-national Differences

- 1. The perspective on and organisation for child welfare and welfare system more broadly
- 2. The approach taken to family and the prevailing social philosophy around family
- 3. The professions and professional philosophies that are dominant
- 4. The 'problems' or 'needs' that the provisions are meant to address

# What Works Best?

- Programmes with more than one method of delivery
- Programmes with measureable concrete objectives
- Programmes with a strong underlying theory and model of how they will improve outcomes for children and parents
- Programmes that are aware of and seek to meet families' other needs as well
- Effective multi-agency working and 'joined up' services
- The blanket application of a particular type of programme can be counterproductive
- Services that allow multiple routes in for families (i.e., have a variety of entry or referral routes)

# Impact - Pros and Cons

- Can make parenting less stressful and enable the parent to feel supported;
- Can reduce the risks of emotional and physical harm to children;
- Can improve children's well-being and development
- However it is not known whether these effects endure and there are risks involved (for example):
- Parental overload/Increased anxiety for parents
- Stigma
- Too much intrusion in family life

# Key Questions/Decisions

- Is it preventive or curative in orientation?
- Where does it line up in terms of support vs behavioural change?
- What is (to be) offered?
- How is to be organised?
- Is it to be top down or bottom up?
- How is it connected to existing services?
- What type of change is targeted and in whom?
- Is it child-focused and/or parent-centred approach?
- How can fathers be brought in?
- What is to count as success and how is it to be evidenced?

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**Marion Macleod**

**Senior Policy and Parliamentary  
Officer**

# Children in Scotland

every child - every childhood

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**Making Scotland the best place in  
the world to grow up?**

**The development and role of a  
national strategy to support  
parents**

**Why does any country need a parenting strategy?**

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- **Understanding and political acceptance that society as a whole has a legitimate and appropriate interest in achieving the best outcomes for children**
- **Knowledge that outcomes for children are integrally connected to and influenced by the parenting they experience**
- **Acceptance that government has a critical role to play in providing the leadership, strategy and resources that enable and support parents to do the best they can in bringing up their children**

**Why did Scotland need a national parenting strategy?**

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- It was clear that many children were falling behind early in life in health and development
- Those that fell behind in early life often did not catch up
- Falling behind was related to the quality of 'inputs' children received
- Lack of the right inputs was highly correlated with poverty and other kinds of disadvantage
- Some parents experienced specific difficulties in looking after older children
- High costs associated with problems rooted in difficulties in parenting
- Some parents did not have or could not readily access support
- Manifesto commitment for new parents in 2011 election
- Recognition that outcomes for children are important to families, but also important to society as a whole
- Government has an appropriate and invaluable role to play

**How was the strategy  
developed?**



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- Listening to practitioners
- Developed key themes
- Specific engagement events on draft strategy
- Ministers specified that strategy had to make a practical difference for families
- Organisations asked to host groups including those working with particular issues such as addictions
- 1500 parents contributed from a wide range of circumstances and experiences
- Final version launched 3 October 2012

**What does it say?**

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- Underlines the importance of parents to a child's healthy development
- Parents need skills and knowledge to provide their children with appropriate care and support - Getting It Right For Every Child should mean that they are enabled to do so
- Children's rights underpin our approach to parental responsibilities
- Important matters like attachment, play, discipline and access to support are covered
- Needs of specific groups are included – parents whose children are in the care system, imprisoned parents, kinship carers, corporate parents
- Fathers' equal responsibilities and roles in parenting are acknowledged

**What will it do?**

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- Value and support Scotland's parents
- Initiate a programme of better coordinated support
- Provide additional funds to local partnerships to improve services
- Reinforce and expand learning about parenting in the school curriculum
- Recognise that parents need different kinds of information and support at different stages in their children's lives
- Promote good parent/child attachment in early childhood and positive relationships at all ages and stages
- Remove the stigma from the need to receive help with being a parent

**What does it aim to change  
for the better?**

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- A clearer picture of what exists currently and what we need to develop
- Break the cycle of transmission of ineffective parenting
- Ensure fathers are included in parenting more effectively
- Signpost to additional support through universal services
- Raise public awareness of the inputs necessary to healthy attachment and cognitive development
- Needs of specific groups will be better addressed
- Reduction of gap between least and most advantaged
- Better outcomes for children

**What do we need to do to  
make the strategy real for  
children and their families?**



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- **Most parents will bring up their children well using their own knowledge, universal service provision, and their network of family and social supports**
- **Some will do so when provided with some help**
- **Some will do so partially when provided with help**
- **Some will need ongoing help and sustained contact**

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**Understand that there are no magic bullets, one size does not fit all, input does not always guarantee output, programmes are useful and can effect positive change but are rarely sufficient on their own**

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- **Public services are involved with children almost invariably because of difficulties in parenting**
- **We cannot get it right for children without getting it right for parents**
- **We need to work on probability rather than actuality if we are to prevent harm and optimise wellbeing**
- **Probability and prediction should not be confused**
- **Performance must be measured by impact on children's wellbeing**

**Better for parents**  
**Better for children**  
**Better for Scotland**

# Children in Scotland

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